

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L BOGOTA 2273

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT, MILI, CO
SUBJ: TURBAY AND THE MILITARY

1. DURING THE CAMPAIGN PRECEDING THE FEBRUARY 26 ELECTION SOME RUMORS WERE THAT THE COLOMBIAN MILITARY WOULD NOT ACCEPT A TURBAY PRESIDENCY. ACCORDINGLY, IF TURBAY WERE TO WIN THE JUNE 4 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION, THE MILITARY WOULD PREVENT HIS INAUGURATION OR WOULD DEPOSE HIM ONCE IN OFFICE.

2. THIS SUBJECT CAME UP DURING A CONVERSATION ON MARCH 8 BETWEEN THE AMBASSADOR AND SENATOR DIEGO URIBE VARGAS, PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENSE COMMISSION, WHO IS TURBAY'S PROBABLE CHOICE TO BE HIS FOREIGN MINISTER, IF HE IS ELECTED. URIBE SAID THAT THERE WAS NO BASIS FOR SUCH RUMORS AND THAT TURBAY ENJOYED EXCELLENT RELATIONS WITH THE COLOMBIAN MILITARY. HE MENTIONED TURBAY'S PARTICIPATION AS A MINISTER IN THE MILITARY JUNTA IN 1957, FOLLOWING THE FALL OF THE ROJAS REGIME. THE MILITARY JUNTA SHOWED THEIR APPRECIATION TO TURBAY BY MAKING HIM AN HONORARY COLONEL IN THE COLOMBIAN ARMY. URIBE WENT ON TO POINT OUT THAT, SUBSEQUENTLY, AS PRESIDENT OF THE SENATE FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENSE COMMISSION, TURBAY HAD REVIEWED MILITARY PROMOTIONS AND PAY RAISES, WHICH HAD ALSO HELPED HIM TO BEFRIEND THE MILITARY. URIBE WAS FIRMLY CONVINCED THAT THE COLOMBIAN MILITARY HAD CONFIDENCE IN TURBAY AND VIEWED HIM AS
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PAGE 02 BOGOTA 02273 110852Z

A FRIEND.

3. COMMENT: IT IS VERY UNLIKELY THAT MASTER POLITICIAN TURBAY HAS MISSED VERY FEW OPPORTUNITIES DURING HIS LONG POLITICAL CAREER TO INGRATiate AND TRY TO WIN OVER THE COLOMBIAN MILITARY, A PRACTICE HE HAS CLOSELY FOLLOWED WITH OTHER INFLUENTIAL POWER GROUPS AS WELL. MISSION OFFICERS HAVE, IN FACT, DISCERNED SOME

GRUMBLING AND ANTIPATHY TOWARD TURBAY AMONG THESE COLOMBIAN MILITARY CONTACTS. IN ANY EVENT, IT SEEMS PROBABLY THAT SOME MILITARY OFFICERS WOULD SHARE THE OPINION OF SOME OF THEIR CIVILIAN COUNTERPARTS: THAT A TURBAY PRESIDENCY WILL BRING ABOUT AN INCREASE IN CORRUPTION AND A DECLINE IN THE VITALITY OF COLOMBIAN INSTITUTIONS. NEVERTHELESS, WE BELIEVE THAT HOLDERS OF SUCH OPINIONS ARE NOT LIKELY TO HAVE CONSTITUTED ANY BLOC AND THAT THEY ARE PROBABLY FAR FROM THINKING SERIOUSLY ABOUT ANY ACTION AGAINST TURBAY. IF ELECTED, TURBAY WOULD HAVE EVERY OPPORTUNITY TO PROVE HIMSELF AS PRESIDENT. HIS ADMINISTRATION WOULD HAVE TO BE A VERY BAD ONE, INDEED, IN ORDER TO SHAKE THE COLOMBIAN MILITARY OUT OF THEIR FIRM COMMITMENT TO ELECTED, CIVILIAN CONSTITUTIONAL GOVERNMENT.

4. WHICHEVER CANDIDATE IS ELECTED ON JUNE 4 THE EMBASSY WILL CONTINUE TO OBSERVE CAREFULLY AND BE PREPARED TO REASSESS THE ATTITUDES OF THE COLOMBIAN MILITARY.
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